

Letters to the Editor  
The Fresno Bee

April 6, 2002

Last week I worried with my wife that the Chaffee Zoological Gardens would succumb to short memories by changing the name to honor a more current celebrity, or by dropping her father's name and reverting to "the Fresno Zoo." Now Steve Rontell recommends just that. [Fresno Bee, April 5, 2002]

He says a name change will help funding, magically curing us of our dislike for high sales taxes. The "Fresno lifer" thinks that if we ignore our heritage, and the contributions of our fellow community members to that heritage, we'll do a better job raising money.

What if, instead, we were to do a better job of honoring the man who worked tirelessly to achieve great things for our community? Then people might say, "Oh, *Fresno!* That's where that great Chaffee Zoo is located, isn't it?"

Teach those who don't know "what" a Chaffee is that "Doc" was one example of all that is good about Fresno. Let them know the 1990 recipient of the R. Marlin Perkins Award (American Zoo and Aquarium Association's highest) developed and modernized a zoo right here in Fresno. Talk about his tireless work traveling to acquire giraffes and elephants, and building relationships with other zoos for exchange and breeding programs. Wonder at the Chaffees raising baby apes and tigers in their home. Think of the surprise when others hear how "Doc" worked so blind people could "see" the animals and taught other zoos to do the same! Fresno can be proud of the historical impact of his service on various AZA boards, including those relating to the ethical treatment of animals. Tell of California's Dr. Paul Chaffee Zoological Program providing almost \$6 million for zoo development, rehabilitation, and restoration, and \$385,000 for cities, counties, non-profits, and California Indian tribes to care for injured animals.

Many zoos have problems raising funds. This hasn't caused the residents of Melbourne to rename the Brevard Zoo, nor has it wiped the names, memories and honor of Gladys Porter from Brownsville, Colonel Dickerson from Springfield, and Roger Williams from Rhode Island. Connecticut's *only* zoo for the last 75 years isn't called "Connecticut Zoo"; it's the Beardsley Zoo.

The name "San Francisco" didn't protect that zoo from near-extinction in the mid-1990s; taxes and increased entrance fees did. San Francisco gives over \$4 million annually to their zoo; Fresno, \$1.2 million—but the Chaffee Zoo had over 400,000 visitors compared to about 800,000 for SF. SF Zoo tickets for adults cost \$10; Fresno, \$6. San Diego's "world-famous zoo" has adult ticket fees of \$19.50; a 3-year-old's ticket costs \$11.75. The city contributes about \$9 million to the zoo and park. They have private and corporate benefactors including the Scripps family and Kodak! Some employers match what their employees give, doubling those donations. The Bronx Zoo gets millions from the City of New York, while adults enter the zoo for \$11 (children: \$6). And the Santa Ana Zoo retained its city's *name*, but lost AZA *accreditation* over a year ago.

We should be proud Fresno is the kind of town that honors its citizens. We should continue to honor the life and hard work of Dr. Paul S. Chaffee.

Sincerely ,

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POSTSCRIPT: Sadly, the Fresno Bee never published this letter. Steve Rontell's letter (referenced above) lives in print as the last word on this issue so far.